

Hidden in Plain Sight:
The True Ending to Mark's Gospel

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It is a Sunday morning. The congregation slowly trickles in and gradually finds their seats. Eventually the pastor makes his appearance and, stepping up to the pulpit, tells his congregation to open up their Bibles. As he begins to read, some brave soul in the congregation speaks up. “But pastor,” he says, “My Bible doesn’t have that verse.”

Many do not take great note until it is brought to their attention, but the question stands, why is my Bible different than that of my pastor, friend, or relative? The many versions today are each translated by different groups of people, so it only makes sense that they are not the same, word for word. However, though translation is a very important issue, the explanation for these differences goes much deeper. Differences in translation alone do not account for why some entire verses or phrases are not to be found in the text of some versions.¹ The clue is hidden in the fine print: a footnote, usually beginning with an enigmatic phrase like “Some MSS (manuscripts) add...” or “Some MSS omit...” What discipline is concerned with addressing these issues? Textual criticism.

Textual Criticism: Definition and Purpose

The textual criticism of the New Testament has existed as a practice for over fifteen hundred years. St. Augustine himself wrote of the purpose of textual criticism in his day, saying that “[T]hose who are anxious to know the Scriptures ought in the first place to use their skill in the correction of the texts....”² In Augustine’s day the text was still being transmitted, so the focus fell on correcting existing MSS. In the present day, however, “The object of textual criticism is to recover, as far as possible, the original text of the New Testament writings.”³ The

¹ The increasingly popular English Standard Version (ESV) omits Matt. 12:47 and John 5:4 from the text and places them in footnotes, to provide just two examples.

² Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. J.F. Shaw (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2009), 47.

³ Vincent Taylor, *The Text of The New Testament: A Short Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 1.

mainstream of modern textual criticism, believing that the New Testament has already been lost,⁴ instead shifts the focus of textual criticism to rediscovery.

The reason textual criticism is deemed necessary is because the autographs⁵ no longer exist and the copies contain human errors caused by extensive copying.⁶ To determine how the Bible originally read, text critics use both external and internal evidences, which are then evaluated based upon a series of generally accepted assumptions; a few of these assumptions are that older manuscripts (MSS) are more reliable, shorter readings are to be preferred over longer ones, etc.⁷ The fruits are such that *A Reader's Greek New Testament* says, "Employing...diverse witnesses, textual scholars have been able to reconstruct a text that has the best probability of representing the words of the original New Testament writers."⁸ However, the practice gets rapidly more difficult and controversial when applied not merely to differences of a single word, but to major textual variants such as the ending of Mark's Gospel.

Modern textual criticism classifies MSS into text families or "types" based upon textual features they share or a common genealogy. For instance, Epp defines a text-type as "...an established cluster or constellation of MSS with a distinctive textual character or complexion that differentiates it from other textual constellations."⁹ Text critics generally support one of two important textual families within the Greek MSS: the Byzantine text¹⁰ or the Alexandrian text.

⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, "The Reliability of the New Testament Manuscripts." in *ESV Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2587. Wallace's exact statement is "[T]he original wording of the NT cannot be known...." He goes on to say that this does not concern him.

⁵ This refers to the original manuscripts which came from the pens of the human authors.

⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 5.

⁷ David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: a Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 34-36.

⁸ Richard J. Goodrich, and Albert L. Lukaszewski. *A Reader's Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 9.

⁹ Eldon Jay Epp, "The Papyrus Manuscripts of the New Testament" in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 16.

¹⁰ Gregory R. Lanier, "Dating Myths, Part Two" in *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Elijah Hixson and Peter J. Gurry (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity

These texts, containing roughly ninety and ten percent of the total number of MSS respectively,¹¹ differ from each other in thousands of places. These differences, known as “variants,” are the issues textual criticism attempts to resolve. Its goal is to identify which reading is correct and which is incorrect.

History of the Issue

In the late 19th century, two textual critics named Westcott and Hort published *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, a document whose influence on the landscape of New Testament (NT) textual scholarship would never be paralleled.¹² It was the first popularly accepted Greek NT of its kind: a critical text.¹³ This critical or “eclectic” text differed radically from the majority text which had been traditionally used by the church,¹⁴ particularly in its omission of the end of Mark's Gospel.¹⁵ This selection of twelve verses, the longest disputed passage in the NT, is as great a question for 21st century scholarship as it was for 19th century scholarship. If one holds to Markan priority in the Synoptic problem, declaring these last twelve verses spurious would be “[L]eaving in the original text no mention of Jesus’ appearing to anyone.”¹⁶

Press, 2019) 113. Lanier catalogs in a footnote the various names of this text family, including Antiochan, Lucianic, Oriental, Asiatic, Constantinopolitan, Syrian, Traditional, *Koine*/K, Alpha, and Ecclesiastical. Of these, among the most commonly used are Majority, Traditional, and Byzantine.

¹¹ Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L Farstad, eds. *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*. (2nd ed. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), vi.

¹² J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 77.

¹³ Critical texts treat Alexandrian MSS (especially α and B) as the most important witnesses concerning textual variants. It is the Alexandrian text upon which modern critical texts most heavily rely.

¹⁴ W. Edward Glenny, “Defining the Terms” in *The Bible Version Debate: the Perspective of Central Baptist Theological Seminary*, ed. Michael A Grisanti (Minneapolis, MN: Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), 48. Glenny puts the number of differences between the two at over 6,500.

¹⁵ Ibid., “Defining the Terms,” 48. “Two major differences between the *Majority Text* and *Eclectic Text* are their treatment of Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11.” [italics original]

¹⁶ Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 101. Blomberg goes on to state that, from this perspective, Matthew, Luke, and John may then be considered “imaginative expansions of what was originally a very brief and enigmatic narrative about some women’s Easter morning confusion.” For more information on the Synoptic problem, see Daniel B. Wallace, “The Synoptic Problem.” The Synoptic Problem | Bible.org. June 2, 2004. <https://bible.org/article/synoptic-problem>.

For many centuries, the last twelve verses of Mark, known as the Long Ending (LE), were almost universally considered by the church to be genuine because they are to be found in ninety-nine percent of the MSS.¹⁷ It was only in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that scholars began to reject the LE in favor of alternative endings. The first critic to deny the genuineness of the LE was Johann Griesbach,¹⁸ who popularized the idea that Mark's Gospel originally had another ending which would have followed verse 8.¹⁹ For many years after Griesbach, the majority position among text critics was that the original ending to Mark had somehow been lost. This position by its nature was based entirely upon interpretation of the literary style and vocabulary.

N. Clayton Croy, one of the most respected contemporary authors supporting a Lost Ending, sums up the position succinctly:

I am, therefore, in wholehearted agreement with the scholarly consensus that affirms that Mark 16:8 is the last extant verse from the hand of the evangelist. However, one may readily grant this and still be convinced that the evangelist intended to write more or, in fact, did write more, but that this ending was lost. This is a literary question quite independent of the text-critical question.²⁰

The primary reason for believing that the original ending had been lost was the sense of abruptness that ending the gospel at 16:8 would create. After examining the four possible ways of ending Mark's gospel, Bruce Metzger, one of the most influential text critics of the late 20th

¹⁷ Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 287.

¹⁸ Dean John William Burgon, *The Last 12 Verses of Mark Vindicated against recent Critical Objectors and established* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today, 1871), 6.

¹⁹ Ibid., 6. "He [Griesbach] was of opinion, however, that 'at some very remote period, the original ending of the Gospel perished,--disappeared perhaps *from the Evangelist's own copy*,--and that the present ending was by some one substituted in its place.'" [italics original]

²⁰ Croy, *The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 27.

century, came to the conclusion that “None of these four endings commends itself as original.”²¹ The 1970s and 1980s, however, saw these arguments begin to lose favor; by the 1990s and early 2000s, these were almost entirely replaced by the belief that Mark had originally intended to end his Gospel at 16:8.²²

The most popular contemporary view is that Mark unexpectedly ended his gospel at 16:8 with the word *γάρ* as a “stylistic punch” to “shock his readers contextually.”²³ This view presents Mark as something of a postmodernist, jarring his audience by shattering their expectations about how the story will end and leaving them to wonder what they just read.

Summation of the Issues

The vast majority of biblical scholars fall into one of two camps: supporters of the LE as the original ending, and supporters of the Short Ending (SE) which concludes with verse 8 as the original ending. The battleground of the debate between these groups is centered on three important categories: manuscript evidence, Patristic evidence, and internal evidence.

In any field of textual criticism, manuscript evidence is always of crucial importance in determining which passages are authentic and which are spurious. There are two specific ways in which MSS affect the debate on any given passage: the quality of the MSS (i.e. age, general trustworthiness, etc.) and the quantity of MSS. Though numbers of MSS supporting a reading are easy to ascertain, determining the quality of those MSS is a source of great controversy.

Regardless of their position on the issue, the critics agree that the LE has the support of the overwhelming number of MSS.²⁴ Daniel Wallace, professor of New Testament Studies at

²¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (3rd ed. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 227.

²² Croy, *Mutilation*, 14.

²³ Kelly R. Iverson, "A Further Word on Final *Γάρ* (Mark 16:8)," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2006): 79-94, www.jstor.org/stable/43725642.

²⁴ Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 287.

Dallas Theological Seminary and widely respected textual critic supporting the SE, states that “[A]t least 95 percent of all Greek MSS and ancient versions have the LE. In fact, that number may be too low.”²⁵ Not only do the vast majority of Greek MSS contain the LE, but it is also contained in a high percentage of the copies of non-Greek translations of the NT.²⁶ For this reason, anti-omission scholars emphasize the large number of Greek and other MSS containing the LE and their widespread geographical distribution when addressing the manuscript evidence.

Though the SE of Mark is attested to in fewer MSS, it has the support of the two oldest extant uncial²⁷ MSS: Codices²⁸ \aleph and B.²⁹ Arguments for the SE based on manuscript evidence tend to be based primarily on the quality of the MSS which, though few in number, are given more respect because of their age and closer chronological proximity to the original writing of the gospel. A common secondary argument for the SE in this category is the argued presence of *sigla* and *scholia*³⁰ in multiple MSS which cast doubt upon the LE.

The Patristic evidence for the Ending of Mark, also a sub-category of external evidence, alongside manuscript evidence, is very different in character. It seeks to ascertain the originality of Scriptural passages based on when and how often it was quoted by church fathers. Since the Fathers often quoted scripture in their writings loosely from memory,³¹ their testimony on the exact wording of verses is to be taken with caution.

²⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel.” in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 10.

²⁶ See Nicholas P. Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark: A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9-20* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 25.

²⁷ An Uncial is a manuscript written in upper-case/capital letters.

²⁸ The word “codex” (singular form of “codices”) means a manuscript in the form of a modern book with binding and covers, as opposed to a scroll.

²⁹ Philip Wesley Comfort, *A Commentary on Textual Additions to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2017), 49. The names of these two important MSS are Sinaiticus and Vaticanus respectively.

³⁰ Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 35. These are “markings” and “notes” respectively.

³¹ Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark Vindicated*, 19-20.

However, as the late 19th century text critic John W. Burgon, a respected LE-supporting scholar, states:

[I]t cannot be too plainly pointed out that when,—instead of certifying ourselves of the *actual words employed* by an Evangelist, their precise *form* and exact *sequence*,—our object is only to ascertain whether a considerable passage of Scripture is genuine or not; is to be rejected or retained; was known or was not known in the earliest ages of the Church; then, instead of supplying the least important evidence, Fathers become by far the most valuable witness of all.³²

Since it is only necessary for a church father to somewhere quote—however loosely—any part of the end of Mark’s Gospel for it to serve as a witness, patristic analysis is of extreme importance to the question of Mark’s conclusion. Patristic evidence is also much more ambiguous; often the same writings, especially those of Eusebius and Jerome, have been cited as support for both the LE and SE.

Though some other church fathers have been cited,³³ the SE perspective on Patristic evidence is based primarily on the testimonies of Eusebius and Jerome. Bruce Metzger, perhaps the most widely known and revered text critic of the past century, states, “Eusebius and Jerome attest that the passage was absent from almost all Greek copies of Mark known to them.”³⁴ On this evidence, the pro-omission party makes the argument that the widespread custom of ending MSS of Mark with verse 8 points to it being the original ending.

The anti-omission perspective on Patristic evidence is primarily a refutation of the pro-omission position. The anti-omission party points to the language used by Eusebius in his book

³² Ibid., 20 [italics original].

³³ Ibid., 39. These other fathers include Gregory of Nyssa, Hesychius of Jerusalem, and Victor of Antioch

³⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (1st ed. Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975), 123.

*Ad Marinum*³⁵ and argues that when the statements cited by the pro-omission party are read within the context of the surrounding text, Eusebius (and Jerome who quotes him) is found to be not an enemy, but perhaps a friend of the LE.³⁶ This evidence leads John Burgon to conclude that “[T]here is nothing whatever in the evidence which has hitherto come before us, --certainly not in the evidence of Eusebius, --to induce us to believe that they are a spurious addition to S. Mark’s Gospel.”³⁷

The third and last category of evidence, the Internal evidence, is the most ambiguous and difficult to interpret. In the field of Internal evidence there are two primary subcategories: arguments from literary style and arguments from vocabulary. Both of these have been the basis of internal objections to the LE for decades, though the stylistic aspect in particular has become especially important because of its postmodern premise.

The pro-omission view of Internal evidence is best summed up by J.K. Elliott in his essay on eclecticism in NT textual criticism: “[T]he language, style, and theology of the longer text brand it as secondary to the original text of Mark.”³⁸ The dominant position imputed to this evidence by supporters of the SE is shown by statement succeeding it, “If the shorter text is in two MSS only, then so be it.” Concerning arguments from style, most SE scholars believe that Mark intentionally ended it at verse 8 because “The suspended ending causes the reader to act on

³⁵ This book is part of a larger work called *Inconsistencies in the Gospels*.

³⁶ One humorous example of the radical difference in interpretation of the Patristic evidence by the two positions is in the description of this work by Burgon (LE supporter) and Westcott/Hort (SE supporters). Burgon in *The Last 12 Verses* (pg. 42) described the extant amount of the work as “a few fragmentary specimens”, whereas W & H describe the same quantity in *Notes on Select Readings* (pg. 30-31) as “considerable extracts”.

³⁷ Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark Vindicated*, 51 [italics original].

³⁸ J.K. Elliott, “Thoroughgoing Eclecticism in New Testament Textual Criticism” in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 332. Elliott restates this position in similar words with Ian Moir on page 40 of his book *Manuscripts and the Text of the New Testament*.

the ending.”³⁹ This interpretation of the ending is further supported by their stance on the vocabulary within the LE, namely, that the number of words and phrases not found elsewhere in Mark’s Gospel contained strongly indicate a spurious origin.⁴⁰

The anti-omission view of style is that an ending at verse 841 is not more powerful or moving, but rather incomplete and deficient. Instead of being ingenious, it is seen as being contrary to the nature of a gospel, which by definition is expected to tell the good news. Concerning vocabulary, when compared with other similarly sized passages in Mark’s Gospel, the seemingly unusual selection of vocabulary in the LE becomes unremarkable. Maurice Robinson, a prominent anti-omission scholar, states that “Appeals to ‘Markan style’ or ‘Markan vocabulary’ . . . appear problematic, and rest upon data more coincidental and transitory than substantial.”⁴²

Thesis

After examining all three categories of evidence in detail, the solution to the textual problem at the ending of Mark becomes clear: the ending which was accepted and used by the church for so many centuries, the LE, should be accepted again by modern textual scholarship and all the church as the original ending. All three evidential categories—Manuscript, Patristic, and Internal—shall be examined in the following sections and each in turn shown to bear witness to the authenticity of verses 9-20. For the purposes of the present discussion, the evidence of the

³⁹ J. Lee. Magness, *Marking the End: Sense and Absence in the Gospel of Mark* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 123.

⁴⁰ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 67. Among other evidences, Ehrman says that “[T]here are a large number of words and phrases in the passage [the LE] that are not found elsewhere in Mark. In short, the evidence is sufficient to convince nearly all textual scholars that these verses are an addition to Mark.”

⁴¹ This would remove the resurrection account from Mark’s Gospel entirely.

⁴² Maurice A. Robinson, “Amid Perfect Contempt, a Place for the Genuine: The Long Ending of Mark as Canonical Verity” in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 66.

versions and lectionaries⁴³ will not be addressed, for the sake of conciseness, nor will the Lost Ending position be represented because it is now held by only a minority of scholars.

Manuscript Evidence

The Manuscript evidence for the ending of Mark is overwhelming. So great is the Manuscript evidence for the LE, that it has been described as “too large to recite.”⁴⁴ Not only is the LE contained within virtually every manuscript of the Byzantine or Majority text family, which comprises eighty-five to ninety percent of the total number of Greek MSS,⁴⁵ but it is also to be found in the *all but two of the Alexandrian MSS*.⁴⁶ In the Greek MSS, the LE has impressive support.

The modern text critical approach, characterized by a “later MSS are worse” approach, has historically favored a widespread rejection of the Byzantine text and the LE by association. However, the wisdom of this approach is beginning to be reconsidered by important figures within the practice. Gregory Lanier, one of many contributors to the recently published *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, critically examines this methodology and comes to the astoundingly traditional conclusion that “Later manuscripts can be better manuscripts.”⁴⁷ It is demonstrated with clarity that “...Byzantine readings often have ancient roots,”⁴⁸ with notable papyri fragments⁴⁹ even siding with the Byzantine tradition in many places

⁴³ Versions are translations of the Greek into other languages. Lectionaries are collections of Scriptural readings traditionally read in church services.

⁴⁴ Robert H. Stein, “The Ending of Mark.” (BBR 18.1 (2008) 79-98), 81.

⁴⁵ See note #11 above.

⁴⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel,” 14. Wallace confirms that \aleph and B “...are the *only* ‘primary’ Alexandrian witnesses to Mark 16 in Greek.” [italics original] Lunn states that there are only two or three Greek MSS total that lack the LE. See Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 25.

⁴⁷ Gregory R. Lanier, “Dating Myths, Part Two” in *Myths and Mistakes*, 110.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁹ The papyri are the earliest extant MSS, predating by many years even \aleph and B, which were penned in the fourth century. Due to their fragility and age, they are generally preserved in fragments rather than relatively intact MSS.

against the early majuscules⁵⁰ (i.e. Uncials),⁵¹ which are primarily Alexandrian. From the agreement of later Byzantine MSS with these numerous important early elements, Lanier concludes that:

Such findings have led several scholars to argue that what later becomes identifiable as “Byzantine” developed progressively over time; that is, a multitude of Byzantine *readings* go back as far as the 200s, though the mature Byzantine tradition or *text-form* did not clearly solidify until the 900s. From a text-critical perspective, then, the fact that “the Byzantine [tradition] has preserved second-century tradition not preserved by the other text types” indicates that it should, at least sometimes, be treated as on par with other witnesses and not discarded to the “late” heap.⁵² [*italics original*]

From these and other evidences, the Byzantine tradition supporting the LE is seen to not only have the greatest quantity of MSS by a wide margin, but also to be at the very least, a repository of many ancient readings that were transmitted accurately through many centuries.

Nonetheless, the pro-omission position maintains that the LE is spurious almost exclusively on the testimony of codices \aleph and B, the earliest extant complete Greek New Testament MSS, which both end at verse eight.⁵³ The belief that the testimonies of these two

⁵⁰ See note #27 above. \aleph and B are examples of this kind of MS.

⁵¹ Gregory R. Lanier, “Dating Myths, Part Two” in *Myths and Mistakes*, 116. “P45, P46, and P66 share over one hundred readings with the Byzantine tradition against the early majuscules, and other chronologically earlier witnesses such as 02, 032, and some versions regularly contain what later become classified as Byzantine variants.”

⁵² *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵³ Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 395. Bock, though a respected text critic makes the objectively false statement in a footnote that “Mark 16:8 is the final verse of Mark in *many* of the older MSS,” [emphasis mine] citing in parentheses \aleph and B as support. In fact, these is no “many.” \aleph and B are the *only* two Greek MSS fitting his description. If he was including versions in this statement, then he did a poor job indicating this according to conventional means.

MSS can stand alone against the rest of the Greek tradition⁵⁴ seems unlikely when these two witnesses are more carefully cross-examined.

It must first be noted that \aleph and B, though written in the 4th century, are still hundreds of years removed from the writing of Mark's Gospel.⁵⁵ Though they are the earliest extant codices containing all the books of the NT, this period of centuries still leaves ample time for corruption to creep into a stream of textual transmission, resulting in an unreliable text. Furthermore, \aleph and B cannot be considered to have preserved the original text of the NT in any sense. Though Wallace claims that \aleph and B together make a "...relatively pure form of the text..."⁵⁶ which he considers to be high quality,⁵⁷ the first sentence of the next paragraph acknowledges that "Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus contain several thousand differences in the Gospels alone...."⁵⁸ Two MSS with such a significant number of differences cannot conceivably be said to constitute a "pure form of the text."

A very large number of pro-omission critics hold unswervingly to these two doubtful MSS, refusing to admit any reading that is not supported by \aleph B. Such is the tenacity with which mainstream TC holds onto these MSS, that some respected, pro-omission critics have opposed the unquestioned acceptance. Elliott, himself opposed to the LE, has criticized this attitude

⁵⁴ Justin Taylor. "An Interview with Daniel B. Wallace on the New Testament Manuscripts." (The Gospel Coalition, March 22, 2012). <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/an-interview-with-daniel-b-wallace-on-the-new-testament-manuscripts/>. According to Daniel Wallace, the total number of Greek New Testament MSS is over 5,800.

⁵⁵ Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 27. Lunn gives the approximate length of time between the origin of Mark and the penning of \aleph and B as three centuries.

⁵⁶ Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel," 14.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 14. "Metzger-Ehrman note that 'textual witnesses connected to Alexandria attest a high quality of textual transmission from the earliest times.'"

⁵⁸ Ibid., 15. Hermann Hoskier, one of the giants of early 20th century TC, puts the number of differences between \aleph and B at 3,036. See Herman C. Hoskier, *Codex B and Its Allies*, Vol. 2 (London: Quaritch, 1914), 1.

toward \aleph and B as being antithetical to the stated procedure of modern TC, which, though claiming to be eclectic, has actually become a “cult of MSS.”⁵⁹

Besides the evidence of \aleph and B, there is another more minor charge leveled against the LE: that of the *scholia* and the *sigla*.⁶⁰ Wallace states that “[T]here are several MSS that indicate some doubt about the authenticity of the LE. They do this in one of two ways: First, the scribe may add a note after v.8.... Second, the scribe might simply place an asterisk or obelisk in the margin, indicating doubt about these verses.”⁶¹ Though parroted by numerous authors,⁶² little to no evidence has been provided that these asterisks and obelisks are meant to indicate spurious passages specifically. The actual evidence is, in fact, quite to the contrary. In a detailed analysis of these *scholia* and *sigla* in multiple MSS, supplemented by images of the passage in question, David W. Hester finds that these charges must be dropped.

None of these manuscripts say that the ancient copies do not contain 16:9-20. The notes in the fourteen manuscripts do not state that 16:9-20 is spurious. Except for the short note in MS 199, they state either that the ancient copies contain the passage, or that while it is not found in some copies, many copies contain it.... The manuscripts listed above simply indicate that there was an awareness of an issue within the textual stream.⁶³

⁵⁹ J.K. Elliott, “A Second Look at the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament.” (*Bible Translator* 26 (1975), 325-32. “Such comments betray the reluctance of the editors to deviate too far from those hypnotic MSS. \aleph B. We should not be surprised by this ... The cult of MSS. Rather than the cult of readings is a questionable principle, *especially in a text which purports to be eclectic*.” [emphasis mine])

⁶⁰ Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 35.

⁶¹ Wallace, “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion,” 26.

⁶² See William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 601; Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 226.

⁶³ David W. Hester, and David H. Warren, *Does Mark 16:9-20 Belong in the New Testament?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 113.

The scribe used a four-dot symbol, which served to inform a reader when or with what phrase to introduce the lection (scripture reading),⁶⁴ in the latter case performing a very similar function to a footnote.

Interestingly, the evidence is often very much the reverse of what is supposed by the critics. Indeed, multiple notations either say that the more ancient or larger number of MSS contains the LE. Rather than being indicators of spuriousness, these must be viewed as neutral indicators of a variant. It seems surprising that so many scholars with access to these MSS should make these claims with no evidential support. Perhaps the most significant of these scholars is Metzger himself. In *The Text of the New Testament*,⁶⁵ Metzger says that “Not a few manuscripts which contain the passage have *scholia* stating that older Greek copies lack it.” As support for this claim, he cites in parentheses, among others, MSS 20 and 22. But Hester shows that the *scholia* in these two MSS do not support this case in any way. The scholium in MS. 20, says nothing of the sort, instead saying that in the ancient copies the LE is, in fact, *present*.⁶⁶ The scholium in MS. 22 reads “In some of the copies, the Gospel comes to a close here, but in many, this also appears.”⁶⁷ So little care has been taken by pro-omission scholars when handling this part of the evidence that blatantly erroneous claims such as these went mostly uncorrected until the relatively recent analyses of Lunn and Hester.⁶⁸ With these refutations, the charges of supposedly hostile *scholia* and *sigla* can be laid forever to rest.

⁶⁴ Hester and Warren, *Does Mark 16:9-20 Belong?*, 104.

⁶⁵ Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 226.

⁶⁶ “ἐντεῦθεν ἕως τοῦ τέλους ἐν τίσιν τῶν ἀντιγράφων οὐ κεῖται • ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἀρχαίοις πάντα ἀπαράλειπτα κεῖται,” is translated by Burgon as “From here to the end forms no part of the text in some of the copies. But in the ancient ones, it all [verses 9-20] appears intact.” [brackets mine] See Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses Vindicated*, 118-19.

⁶⁷ Hester and Warren, *Does Mark 16:9-20 Belong?*, 97.

⁶⁸ See Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 35-8. Lunn’s book having been published in 2014 and Hester’s in 2015, makes their analysis of the scribal notes and markings a relatively recent development in the realm of NT textual criticism.

Patristic Evidence

Just as with the Manuscript evidence, the second category of evidence—the Patristics—also gives palpable evidence for the LE. Lunn, for instance, provides a list of eighteen church fathers from the late third to mid fifth century who show knowledge of and support for the LE.⁶⁹ With the question at hand being simply a problem of the omission or inclusion of a passage, the significance of this evidence cannot be understated, because the dates of many of these fathers put their testimony within the same time period as the two primary manuscript witnesses for omission: Codex \aleph and Codex B. The Patristic evidence is not only numerous but early, with some strong witnesses existing from as early as the mid 2nd century.

One significant father bearing witness to the last twelve verses is Justin Martyr, whose first apology dates to around 151 A.D.⁷⁰ This apology contains a phrase in the exact same grammatical form as verse 20 and is widely conceded as having been drawn from the LE.⁷¹ This evidence is significant not only because of its extremely close wording to the LE, but also because it too is in close proximity to the original writing of Mark's Gospel. Indeed, it is over a century and a half closer than either \aleph or B. The solidarity of this evidence prompts Burgon to write "[T]hus is it found that the conclusion of S. Mark's Gospel was familiarly known within fifty years of the death of the last of the Evangelists."⁷²

⁶⁹ Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 109-10. Examples include Aphrahat the Persian, Augustine of Hippo, Nestorius, etc.

⁷⁰ Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses Vindicated*, 23.

⁷¹ Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 76. Mk. 16:20 contains the phrase ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν πανταχοῦ (going out everywhere they preached), which Justin Martyr quotes in the same grammatical form as ἐξελθόντες πανταχοῦ ἐκήρυξαν. Lunn also lists a number of other places in Justin's writings in which he is likely quoting from the LE. One of the most significant of these is in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, in which he writes εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνελήμφθη (ascended into heaven) in a close echo of Mk. 16:19 ἀνελήμφθη εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.

⁷² Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses Vindicated*, 23.

Perhaps the most important witness of all the early church fathers, however, is Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons. Living in the latter half of the second century, Irenaeus not only quotes Mark 16:19 verbatim in his work *Adversus Haereses*, but also explicitly states that he was quoting from the end of Mark's Gospel.⁷³ As with Justin Martyr, this testimony also comes long before the earliest complete MSS of the gospels.⁷⁴ Though many other fathers and their witness concerning the LE could be discussed, even a brief examination of Justin and Irenaeus alone serves to show the strong base on which the Patristic evidence for the LE is founded. William R. Farmer writes about the patristics in his famous study on these verses, "In fact, *external evidence from the second century for Mk. 16:9-20 is stronger than for most other parts of that Gospel.*"⁷⁵

There are, however, several fathers whose testimony on the ending of Mark is disputed, among the greatest of which is Eusebius. In a part of *Ad Marinum*, Wallace quotes Eusebius as saying that nearly all the copies of Mark, including the accurate ones, conclude with "for they were afraid."⁷⁶ On this seemingly solid basis, Eusebius is labelled a hostile witness to the LE and is among the first of the church fathers cited against the LE in summaries of evidence against the it.⁷⁷ However, to quote only this portion of *Ad Marinum* gives a very misleading idea of the situation. In the witness of Eusebius, context is key.

⁷³ Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 82.

⁷⁴ Burgon makes the strong argument that "It is in fact a mere trifling with words to distinguish between 'Manuscript' and 'Patristic' testimony in a case like this: for...the passage quoted from S. Mark's Gospel by Irenaeus is to all intents and purposes *a fragment from a dated manuscript*; and *that MS.*, demonstrably older by at least one hundred and fifty years than the oldest copy of the Gospels which has come down to our times." Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses Vindicated*, 24 [italics original].

⁷⁵ William R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses*, 31 [italics original]. Farmer then confirms that "...none of these second-century authors shows any consciousness of a divided state in the textual witness." This is a strong indication of how widely accepted the LE was at this early date.

⁷⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion," 21. The complete quote included by Wallace is as follows. "This can be solved in two ways. The person not wishing to accept [these verses] will say that it is not contained in all copies of the Gospel according to Mark. Indeed the accurate copies conclude the story according to Mark in the words ... they were afraid. For the end is here in nearly all the copies of Mark."

⁷⁷ Comfort, *A Commentary on Textual Additions*, 49. Here Comfort cites both Eusebius' Canons and "MSS according to Eusebius" against the LE.

It should be noticed that Eusebius prefaced his unfavorable statements to the LE with “He who is for getting rid of the entire passage, will say...”⁷⁸ This is only one of the options that Eusebius gives for solving the textual problem which involves the ending of Mark. The other option Eusebius presents a few lines later: “But another, on no account daring to reject anything whatever which is, under whatever circumstances, met with in the text of the Gospels, will say that here are two readings, (as is so often the case elsewhere); and that *both* are to be received...” Wallace contests that the first solution is the one personally favored by Eusebius. Burgon challenges this interpretation, observing that it makes little sense for Eusebius, if he indeed considered the last twelve verses to be spurious, to launch into a complicated solution of the problem at hand rather than take his own advice and ignore the passage.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Eusebius concludes these unfavorable comments to the LE with “[T]his then is what a person will say...” This strongly suggests his neutrality and caution to jump to conclusions in the debate. If Eusebius is not a witness for the LE, he is certainly not to be branded a witness against it. At the very least, his testimony in this passage ought to be considered neutral, because this is how Eusebius chose to present himself.⁸⁰

The other patristic witness most often cited against the LE is Saint Jerome, best known for his creation of the Latin Vulgate. Jerome’s statements on the ending of Mark are agreed by all to be chiefly translations or close paraphrases of the aforementioned writings by Eusebius.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses Vindicated*, 44-5. The translation is Burgon’s own and also the one which the author shall use in this thesis.

⁷⁹ Ibid., “It would, in fact, be to make this learned Father stultify himself to suppose that he proceeds gravely to discuss a portion of scripture which he had already deliberately rejected as spurious.”

⁸⁰ Farmer adds to the discussion the extreme unlikelihood that these verses were actually “met with seldom,” considering that they were contained within Tatian’s text, the lectionaries, Latin, Syrian, etc. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses*, 12. Burgon agrees, giving examples of church fathers misstating textual evidence and adding that “The Fathers are, in fact, constantly observed to make critical remarks about the ancient copies which simply *cannot* be correct.” Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses Vindicated*, 49 [italics original].

⁸¹ Wallace, “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel,” 23. See also Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses Vindicated*, 53.

This objective translation and reiteration of Eusebius would suggest that the verdict on Jerome ought to be the same: Jerome ought to be pronounced neutral in this conflict. Indeed, the evidence weighs more heavily in favor of the position that Jerome accepted the LE than that he was against it. The most telling piece of evidence is that Jerome includes these verses in the Vulgate, his Latin translation of the scriptures, with no apparent reservation. Wallace discounts this fact by proposing that Jerome may have included it against his better judgment because of “...antiquity, tradition of timidity, or not wanting to rock the boat too much.”⁸²

However, this hardly seems to fit the character of Jerome, who was known for his obstinacy. Furthermore, Jerome clearly showed in other ways that he was not one to fear “rocking the boat.” For example, the Old Testament of his Latin translation of the scriptures, the Vulgate, was translated directly from the original Hebrew rather than the Septuagint;⁸³ this made him the object of intense criticism from many theologians and textual scholars of the day who considered the Septuagint to be inspired—even his friend and acquaintance St. Augustine disagreed with him on the issue.⁸⁴ Despite the overwhelming disapproval, Jerome continued with his faith in the Hebrew. There is little reason to believe that, in light of his personal reputation and actions, Jerome would have excluded the LE to please the crowd; rather, he included them because he felt it was their proper place.

In conclusion of the Patristic evidence, the LE is seen to have the support not only of a great number of the fathers,⁸⁵ but also of the earliest fathers. Though aware of the existence of a textual problem at the ending of Mark, the two fathers most frequently cited against the LE,

⁸² Ibid., 23. The full context of the quote is as follows. “Jerome’s statement has also been discounted because he included the LE in the Vulgate. Why would he do that? Perhaps for the same reasons that it is included in Bibles today—call it antiquity, tradition of timidity, or not wanting to rock the boat too much.”

⁸³ The Septuagint (LXX) was the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT scriptures.

⁸⁴ Samuel Gist (teacher, M.A. in Medieval History from King’s College London), in discussion with the author, February 14, 2020.

⁸⁵ See note #69 above.

Eusebius and Jerome, have both been shown to have been misleadingly labelled hostile to the LE. Eusebius is discovered to be neutral with a probable leaning in favor of the LE from his language and Jerome, far from being an enemy of the LE, is found to be well-disposed toward it. Even if the discussion surrounding these last two is cast aside, however, “Explicit patristic *citation* from the second century (Justin, [Tatian], Irenaeus) outweighs patristic *speculation* of the surround the fathers of the fourth century onward, whether concerning the works of Eusebius, Jerome (in repetition), Victor of Antioch, or Hesychius.”⁸⁶ [italics mine. Brackets in original]

Internal Evidence

The third and last category, the Internal evidence, is by nature extremely subjective and arguments based upon it are of somewhat questionable quality. In spite of this, it is perhaps the most important to the critics when attempting to prove the long ending spurious.⁸⁷ For a period of centuries it was thought by many prominent text critics that the original ending of Mark was not 16:8.⁸⁸ Westcott and Hort themselves said that “It is incredible that the evangelist deliberately concluded either a paragraph with ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ, or the Gospel with a petty detail of a secondary event, leaving his narrative hanging in the air.”⁸⁹ The Manuscript evidence, as has been demonstrated above, is insufficient to prove that the LE is spurious; in fact, it provides much evidence for the opposite conclusion. To reach a final verdict on the LE, a thorough examination of the Internal evidence is vital. So much do the pro-omission scholars lean upon

⁸⁶ Robinson, “The Long Ending of Mark,” 76.

⁸⁷ For instance, when discussing the evidence against the LE, Ehrman devotes a mere fraction of a sentence to the external evidence and a page and a half to the internal. When the outer walls have been taken, it is to this citadel that pro-omission scholars fall back to make their stand. See Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 67-8.

⁸⁸ Croy gives a comprehensive list of well over fifty critics both past and present who reject an ending at 16:8 in Appendix A. See Croy, *Mutilation*, 174-7.

⁸⁹ Westcott and Hort, *Notes on Select Readings*, 46. On the following page they also remark how “...it becomes incredible not merely that St. Mark should have closed a paragraph with a γάρ, but that his one detailed account of an appearance of the Resurrection should end upon a note of unassuaged terror.”

the Internal evidence, that if shown to not cast reasonable doubt upon the LE, the case against these verses must be permanently laid to rest.⁹⁰

The contemporary generation of textual critics attempts to justify the ending at 16:8 on several internal grounds, the first of which is vocabulary. Pro-omission scholar J.K. Elliott lists fourteen vocabulary features found in the LE that are considered to be indicative of non-Markan authorship.⁹¹ Since some of these features are used more than once, the LE is generally agreed to contain seventeen words that are non-Markan.⁹² Elliott, whom Daniel Wallace trusts to be capable of presenting a convincing internal case against the LE,⁹³ lists these features as being self-explanatory, dismissing them, without analysis, with the comment “It is self-deceiving to pretend that the linguistic questions are still ‘open.’”⁹⁴ Finally, he concludes saying “Could we perhaps find another passage in Mark of a length comparable to 9-20 and examine if its language and style are equally dissimilar to the rest of Mark? But I doubt if another similar passage betraying such anomalies exists.”

By this treatment of the vocabulary evidence, Elliott would seem to concede that if such a passage (or passages) *could* be found, it would be a noteworthy problem for the pro-omission perspective. Since then, Nicholas Lunn has done just such a study and found multiple examples of passages with notable numbers of unique vocabulary, one significant example of which is Mk.

⁹⁰ See Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses*, 75. “The presumption that the autograph of Mark ended at ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ is dependent, at least in part, on a widespread belief that a careful study of the linguistic, stylistic, and conceptional character of Mk. 16:9-20 indicates that these verses do not belong with the rest of the Gospel.”

⁹¹ J.K. Elliott, “The Last Twelve Verses of Mark: Original or Not?” in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 88-9. For a full list of all seventeen vocabulary words which are generally cited as being non-Markan, see Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 119-120.

⁹² Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 227.

⁹³ Daniel B. Wallace, “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel,” 29. “Because J.K. Elliot’s [sic] essay in this volume focuses on internal evidence, I will make my comments here rather brief.”

⁹⁴ Elliott, “Original or Not?” 89.

15:42-16:5.⁹⁵ This passage contains one hundred seventy-five words total compared to the one hundred sixty-six of the long ending, making it of closely comparable length. An analysis of this passage reveals a total of seventeen words and phrases not found elsewhere in Mark's Gospel, the same number as the LE.⁹⁶ The vocabulary evidence is not as hostile to the LE as is popularly thought and is open to a wide range of interpretations, making it inconclusive at best. Dr. William Kay, however, challenges the critical paradigm which forms the basis for the preceding pro-omission vocabulary arguments, pointing out how the popular perception of vocabulary and its application to individual chapters is fundamentally flawed:

According to this argument, *the recurrence of the same words* constitutes identity of style; the want of such recurrence implies difference of style—difference of style in such a sense as compels us to infer diversity of authorship. Each writer is supposed to have at his disposal a limited number of “formulae” within the range of which he must work. He must in each chapter employ these formulae, and these only. He must be content with one small portion of his mother-tongue, and not dare to venture across the limits of that portion, —on pain of losing his identity.⁹⁷

Though the vocabulary of the LE often enters the discussion in works and summaries of the ending of Mark, it is not usually discussed at length. The backbone of the pro-omission

⁹⁵ Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 120-127. Some of the other passages displaying a high amount of unique vocabulary that are particularly close in length to the LE include Mk. 1:2-11; 9:42-50; 12:1-11; 13:14-23; 14:1-9. Lunn further points out that not only do these undisputed passages contain a high number of “non-Markan” vocabulary, but they also *lack* certain words and features commonly thought as characteristic for Mark's Gospel. For example, in all of the passages listed above, the classic Markan words *εὐθὺς* and *πάλιν* only occur once, with the former appearing in Mk. 1:10 and the latter in Mk. 12:4. Furthermore, Lunn brings attention to the absence of the historical present, another typical element of Markan style, in all of these passages.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹⁷ William Kay, *Crisis Hupfeldiana: being an examination of Hupfeld's criticism on Genesis* (Oxford and London, 1865), 34. Burgon points out that though Kay's work is specifically concerned with the book of Genesis, his comments upon the nature of vocabulary-based evidence remain just as relevant to the present discussion. See Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses Vindicated*, 140 fn. h [italics original].

internal arguments is the argument from style. Before addressing the larger stylistic issues at hand, however, it is first imperative that a brief mention of *γάρ* and whether or not it can end a book be included. *Γάρ*, a conjunction in this context often translated as “for,” was an extremely rare word to end a sentence with in the days of Mark, which is demonstrated by the low number of examples found from this time and before. Croy notes that the number of instances in narrative are especially few⁹⁸ and no examples have been found of *γάρ* ending a book,⁹⁹ making this ending suspect.

If the Internal evidence in general is subjective, then its heart—the arguments concerning style—is doubly so. Yet in spite of this uncertain ground, style is the foundation which too often forms the basis of pro-omission arguments.¹⁰⁰ Wallace describes the SE as allowing the readers to be active participants in the story instead of passive observers.¹⁰¹ This postmodernist literary mindset¹⁰² believes that “...Mark may well have intended to bring his reader up short with this abrupt ending—a clever way to make the reader stop, take a faltering breath, and ask: *What?*”¹⁰³ If this were indeed his intention, what better way to accomplish his goal than to excise the entire resurrection account, leaving a blank space exactly where the reader would expect to find it?

⁹⁸ Croy, *Mutilation*, 48. Though a supporter of the SE, Kelly Iverson voices agreement with this statement in his response to Croy. See Kelly R. Iverson, *A Further Word on Final Γάρ (Mark 16:8)*, 87.

⁹⁹ Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 228.

¹⁰⁰ Tregelles, an influential text critic of the mid 19th century, said that “[A]rguments on *style* are often very fallacious, and that *by themselves* they prove very little; but when there does exist external evidence, and when internal proofs as to style, manner, verbal expression, and connection, are in accordance with...forming a judgement, then these internal considerations possess very great weight.” [italics original] However, as has been shown above, the external evidence is overwhelming in favor of the LE, which leaves arguments from style without crutches to walk upon. See Samuel P. Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament with Remarks on Its Revision upon Critical Principles* (Cambridge University Press, 2013. First published London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1854), 256.

¹⁰¹ Wallace, “Mark 16:8 As the Conclusion to the Second Gospel,” 34.

¹⁰² Robinson, “The Long Ending of Mark,” 75. Robinson correctly identifies this as a distinctly “postmodern viewpoint.” Magness’ description of the reader’s reaction as an “existential crisis” confirms this classification. See Magness, *Sense and Absence*, 125.

¹⁰³ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 68 [italics original].

Though the surprise and abruptness described by Ehrman is one aspect of imputed to the SE, Magness describes in detail the deeper reaction he believes the reader was intended to have:

Because we read in the ending the beginning, we are forced to look back for the shape of the ending. Because we read the ending as a new beginning, we are forced to look forward for the substance of the ending. “While the narrator may be finished, the reader’s work begins; for the women’s reaction becomes the prism through which the entire preceding narrative must be reviewed.” The ending initiates the process of retrospection and of expectation; it demands that we ask—because it did not tell—“what has happened?” and “what will happen?”¹⁰⁴

The primary problem with such arguments is that they are purely speculative. There is no hard evidence that Mark was going for a “shock and awe” approach in his conclusion. Neither is there any real indication elsewhere that Mark was an “astonishingly modernistic”¹⁰⁵ narrator. Yet it is upon this argument that the bulk of the weight seems to rest. Against the objective, indisputable witness of 99% of the MSS—Byzantine, Alexandrian, and every other category—previously established to also be quality witnesses, the reader is asked to trust the personal opinions of the pro-omission scholars. Putting aside for a moment the unreasonable emphasis placed on evidence which by nature is clearly secondary, the very essence of a Gospel speaks against an abrupt ending at verse eight. Simply put, “Mark is a Gospel, a proclamation of good news; not a brooding, inexplicable, existentialist riddle.”¹⁰⁶ Mark was not writing a philosophical treatise, but a Gospel.

¹⁰⁴ Magness, *Sense and Absence*, 125.

¹⁰⁵ Croy, *Mutilation*, 171.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 42. Metzger says that “...the present writer cannot believe that the note of fear would have been regarded as an appropriate conclusion to an account of the Evangel, or Good News.” See Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 228.

The SE supporters counter these arguments with the research of men like J. Lee Magness in the latter half of twentieth century, who argue that because there are examples of “open” endings in ancient literature and the rest of the Bible, it is possible that Mark could have done this with his own conclusion. It must be noted first that arguments supporting the *possibility* Mark ended with verse 8, however numerous, still do not supply much *probability*. But for argument’s sake, a few of these claims shall be more closely critiqued.

Magness first brings to the stand the Iliad, arguing that they are examples of ancient Greek literature with suspended endings. Magness argues that the Iliad ends without having related the events which it has been building up to, leaving its readers hanging.¹⁰⁷ It begins with the war already in full fury and ends before the city of Troy falls. But the stated purpose of the Iliad is to be found within the first several lines, “Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus’ son Achilles and its devastation....”¹⁰⁸ The purpose of the Iliad is declared by its author from the very beginning to be a chronicle of the wrath of Achilles.¹⁰⁹ Looking to the end of the Iliad, this purpose is seen to have been accomplished. Hector, the hero of Troy, killer of Achilles’ friend Patroclus, has been struck down by Achilles himself and the story ends with his funeral. Magness argues that this still classifies as a suspended ending because it does not relate the death of Achilles or the fall of Troy,¹¹⁰ but these were not the stated goals of the Iliad. After the killing of Patroclus, Hector becomes the object of the “wrath of Achilles,” leading to a great fight in which he is killed. His death could be symbolically interpreted as the burial of Achilles’ wrath, providing closure to the story.

¹⁰⁷ Magness, *Sense and Absence*, 29.

¹⁰⁸ Homer and Richard P. Martin, *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), Bk. 1, Lines 1-2.

¹⁰⁹ Croy, *Mutilation*, 91. “If the *Iliad* is the story of the Trojan War, then without question, the ending is open. The final book of the *Iliad* does not provide closure on the war. But judging from the clues the author has given us, the *Iliad* is *not* the story of the Trojan War!”

¹¹⁰ Magness, *Sense and Absence*, 31.

Another example proposed by Magness of a suspended ending is the play *Medea*.

Magness says that this is “perhaps the most dramatic example of this second level of suspension...”¹¹¹ which he identifies as “The substitution of a report about a critical event for the staging of the event itself.”¹¹² However, the relevance of this example to the ending of Mark is questionable. The suspension referred to was the killing of Medea’s children, which takes place off stage. The audience hears the screams the boys make when their mother attacks them and later sees the bodies with her when she leaves.¹¹³ Unlike the proposed ending at verse 8, this conclusion leaves nothing unseen. The murder of the children has happened and the audience has seen the bodies. The fact that they have not witnessed the murder itself does little to affect the overall closure of the story.

N. Clayton Croy exposes the primary weaknesses in the studies of Magness. The specificity of Magness’ questions makes the criteria for what qualifies as a “suspended” ending so broad that it ceases to be useful. Croy points out that “...the test of a suspended ending cannot be the reader’s ability to ask what happened next, for this is always possible.” Even the classic “happily ever after,” providing the closure to so many fairy tales, could be questioned mercilessly by the critic.¹¹⁴ Ultimately, arguments attempting to justify the SE based upon arguable connections to other ancient texts are unconvincing and lacking in impact.

Another important stylistic consideration that weighs in favor of the LE is the presence of various themes which continue through Mark’s gospel and into the LE. For instance, Mark

¹¹¹ Ibid., 38

¹¹² Ibid., 37.

¹¹³ Ibid., 38.

¹¹⁴ Croy, *Mutilation*, 92. Croy further analyzes the problems with the pro-omission method of critique concerning suspended endings saying, “Sometimes the perception of ‘openness’ may, in fact, be a misperception of the story’s purpose. Like the person who hears the punch line of a joke and asks, ‘And then what happened?’ readers sometimes ask inappropriate questions.” See Croy, *Mutilation*, 94.

contains at least one miracle account in each of his first eleven chapters,¹¹⁵ with a couple not even being found within any other gospel.¹¹⁶ Considering the brevity of Mark's gospel in comparison with the others,¹¹⁷ a remarkably large portion of it is devoted to chronicling the miracles of Jesus. Having established the presence of this stream of miracles threading throughout Mark's gospel and the evident importance he attached to them, is it likely that he would elect to entirely omit the single greatest miracle in the life of Christ: the Resurrection?

Conclusion

With all the arguments considered, the three major categories of evidence demonstrate clear, positive witness to the LE. The Manuscript evidence has revealed that all the thousands of Greek MSS, excepting only two, are in support of the LE. The character of these two MSS, \aleph and B, has been shown to be doubtful even without considering the quantity, quality, and general diversity of witnesses against them. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the great belief in the infallibility of \aleph and B, upon which the external case for omission must rest, is falling out of favor. As early as 1902, the German critic Adalbert Merx criticized this extreme faith in his two-thousand page work on the Gospels, writing, "We are sworn to \aleph B and would rather cause the Evangelists to write nonsense than admit that an accidental variant reading is in \aleph and B."¹¹⁸ The Patristic evidence solidifies the LE by providing the support of early Church fathers and demonstrating that those fathers like Eusebius and Jerome who are popularly perceived as hostile to the LE are not so at all. Lastly, the Internal evidence against the LE is reliant on shaky

¹¹⁵ Hendriksen, William, *Mark*, vol. 2, *New Testament Commentary* (Baker Books, 2004. First published 1975), 19.

¹¹⁶ Mk. 7:31-37; 8:22-26 are two examples of this. See Hendriksen, *Mark*, 19.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁸ Adalbert Merx, *Die vier kanonischen Ev. Nach ihrem ältesten bekannten Texte / Übersetzung und Erläuterung der syrischen im Sinaikloster gefundenen Palimpsesthandschrift von Adalbert Merx*, 194. My translation with assistance from Mr. Robert Shearer.

speculation, the LE actually fitting into Mark's gospel without either significant vocabulary or stylistic difficulties.

With these verses having been accepted by the church for over a thousand years, it is only logical that the burden of proof for these verses should rest on the pro-omission scholars. This is a heavy burden, for the preceding analysis has repeatedly shown that the evidence for rejecting the LE is weak and often subjective, exaggerated, or mischaracterized. This being so, why does modern textual scholarship persist in rejecting the LE? The most viable textual reason is that contemporary scholarship still hasn't shaken off the baggage of Westcott and Hort's theories, most significantly the aforementioned devotion to \aleph and B. Without these two questionable MSS, the case against the LE is reduced almost exclusively to the speculation of the Patristic and Internal evidences, at which point it is hardly recognizable as text criticism, lacking any Greek MSS to cite as support.

This selection of twelve verses, the longest disputed passage in the NT, is as important a question for 21st century scholarship as it was for 19th century scholarship. Though it is popularly claimed that no core doctrine is put in danger because of the decisions made in textual criticism,¹¹⁹ the ultimate verdict on the genuineness of these verses is crucially important. Not only is some of its content unique to the gospels and of great interest in the issues of baptism and spiritual gifts, but also because it contains the only resurrection account of that Gospel. This latter point becomes of even greater importance if, as is popularly believed, Mark was the first gospel written.¹²⁰ Furthermore, it is crucial to remember the responsibility of the textual critic in his work. When treating a text directly inspired by God, the verdict on the authenticity of any

¹¹⁹ Wallace, "The Reliability of the New Testament Manuscripts," 2588. Wallace repeats the oft stated declaration concerning Mark 16:9-20 and other similar verses that "...no essential truths are lost if these verses are not authentic."

¹²⁰ See note #16 above.

passage should be made with the greatest care, rather than rejecting it out of hand on the basis of weak arguments.

So long as the antiquated doctrines of Westcott and Hort continue to hold sway over textual scholarship, the debate on the ending of Mark will not be resolved and modern language translations based upon it will continue to mislead believers or, at worst, cause them to doubt the authority of the Bible. The previously discussed examples of incomplete and dishonest work from prestigious scholars supporting omission are sufficient to show that their minds are set. Whatever the evidence, the LE will continue to be rejected by much of the text critical profession. But for the Christian layman who can come at the issue objectively and judge the arguments based upon their respective merits, the authenticity of the LE is solidified without doubt. The church has had the original ending of Mark for more than one and a half millennia, considering it authoritative in matters of doctrine. Only today has this true ending become hidden in plain sight.

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